

# Science Explains Anna Held's Awakening from Two Hours of Death

## The Tragic Mystery of Suspended Animation Which Closed So Dramatically the Career of the Famous French Woman

THE tragedy of poor Anna Held's death has not ceased to excite the interest of many thousands of people. Even before her end it was widely remarked as very strange that one who had contributed more than any other actress, perhaps, to the gayest form of theatrical entertainment should close her career in the prime of life by a peculiarly mysterious and agonizing disease.

The nature of Anna Held's last illness proved an enigma to more than a score of physicians. After several guesses had been made and abandoned it was accepted for several months that she was suffering from multiple myeloma, a very rare affection of the marrow of the bones, of which only fifty-two cases have been recorded. Then, in the last few weeks before her death, it was seriously questioned whether this diagnosis was correct.

In addition to all this uncertainty about the nature of her illness, Anna Held presented in her last hours a case of "suspended animation," that mysterious condition which has proved an inexplicable puzzle to physicians and scientists, and has caused terror and anguish to countless persons, who have feared burial alive for themselves or their loved ones while in the apparently lifeless state.

The reports tell us that Anna Held had been in a semi-conscious condition for about a week. At five minutes of four o'clock in the afternoon the dying actress's watching daughter saw that her mother's breath had suddenly stopped. She called the attention of the attending physician, Dr. E. M. Overton, who declared that Anna Held was dead.

The news was sent out to the newspapers and to many persons interested. For nearly two hours, it is said, the condition continued. Then the watchers mourning by the bedside of the "dead" were amazed to see her breathe once more. Her eyes were open wide, her bosom slowly rose and fell as she breathed again. Her cheeks flushed with color.

The physician pronounced Anna Held alive. A correction was flashed out to those who had received the earlier announcement. Then in a few minutes breathing stopped again and all the signs of death returned. The attendants watched for hours, hoping that there might be signs of life, but this time the physician decided that real death had come.

That "suspended animation" really occurs there can be little question. Scientists differ as to the nature of the condition. Some believe that there may be a real suspension of the vital functions, while others assert that these functions—breathing, heart action, circulation, etc.—are in a state of extremely low activity, which is difficult to perceive.

We know that fish live frequently throughout the winter enclosed in a block of ice, in which it seems breathing must be impossible. Frogs and reptiles are often found alive after being enclosed in ice, in mud, in the interior of trees and, it is even asserted, within stones.

So many reputable witnesses have declared the Hindu fakirs have the power of voluntarily putting themselves in a state of suspended animation that the fact can hardly be questioned. The Hindu, wishing to pass into this calm and impassive state, sits cross-legged on the ground, composes himself into a very calm and impassive state. His friends then turn his tongue back into his throat, stop his nose and ears with wax and perform certain other acts for him.

After this the subject can exist without food, water or air, and remain apparently lifeless for many months, and can even be buried beneath the earth. At the end of a certain time his friends revive him, and he is as much alive as ever. This strange system has been made the subject of many romantic stories. In Robert Louis Stevenson's "Master of Ballantrae," the villain, finding escape from his mortal enemies impossible, resorted to the Hindu method of burying himself alive. A mistake was made in the resuscitation, however, and the Master died a horrible death.

Dr. J. Brindley James, of London, discussing many cases of suspended animation, writes:

"In the Medical Times a distinguished British general reported that he had seen a fakir disinterred from a grave wherein he had been placed forty-two days before,

### Famous French Woman

Anna Held as She Was Years Ago When She First Sprang Into Fame

PHOTO BY CHICAGO BOSTON.



"Buried Alive"—the Powerful Painting by Antoine Joseph Wiertz, the Mad Belgian Artist, Which Typical One of the Horrors of the Awakening from the Condition Known as "Suspended Animation."

over which, during these six weeks' interval, corn had grown, and within which it was manifestly impossible for any sustenance or any atmospheric air to reach him. The limbs of this apparent corpse were stiff and shrivelled (the latter a frequent characteristic of these religious devotees), though the face was normal, but no pulsation was perceptible anywhere. Yet this man speedily revived, and to such good purpose that he voluntarily offered to be buried again in the general's own garden throughout another six weeks."

What occurs in extreme cases of suspended animation appears to be a cessation of all the higher functions—thinking, breathing, circulation of the blood, movement, etc. The remnant of vitality that persists is similar to that of the lowest forms of animal life, such as the amoebae and is accompanied by a fall in temperature to a point near that of these primitive animals. The condition is also known as trance.

Dr. Franz Hartmann, a noted authority, says:

"Apparent death is a state that resembles real death so closely that even the most expert observers believe such a person to be really dead. In many cases not even the most experienced physician, coroner or undertaker can distinguish a case of apparent death from real death, either by external examination or by means of the stethoscope, or by any of the various tests which have been proposed by this or that writer, for all of these tests have proved to be fallible, and it is now useless to discuss them at length, because the medical profession has already agreed that there is no sign that a person is really and not apparently dead except the beginning of a certain stage of putrefaction."

The trance state is said to be induced by many illnesses and also by excesses of various kinds.

Dr. John B. Huber, a well-known New York physician, discussing the subject, said:

"There have been cases, even where death from illness was not impending, in which a general inertia and catalepsy have very closely simulated the condition and the state of the dead."

"There have also been cases of a spasmodic state in which only a slight quivering of the eyelids has evidenced the continuation of the vital processes."

"The onset of such a lethargic or trance-like condition may be gradual, or it may come with startling abruptness. The appearance may be one of natural sleep. All sensations appear to be abolished; and yet, on returning to consciousness, the sufferer who has passed through such an experience will be able to report all that has occurred during the weird somnambulism."

"In such a case the pulse rate may be so diminished that there may appear to be no pulse at all. The breathing may be so shallow and infrequent that doubt may well be entertained whether there be any breathing at all. The temperature may be so subnormal that one may doubt whether any functioning (during which bodily heat is always generated) is continuing. The limbs may be rigid, as in death."

"Such a state may last minutes or hours or, indeed, months; and then, of a sudden, it will be terminated by the utterance of a few delirious words or by a fit of gruesome and uncanny laughter, or by a flow of tears, or perhaps by a convulsive seizure."

"There is no reason, from a careful review of the history of such cases, to believe that there is ever such a state as practical death, with a return later to living functioning. The functioning is, though remarkably attenuated, going on all the time. It is amazing, however, how such a syncope will simulate real cessation of the vital processes, while there will yet

be no real death. There is never absolute going out of the light of life, followed by a rekindling of the vital flame; certainly there has been no authentic instance of this."

"Consider only those three vital signs—the pulse, the respiration and the temperature. Though no pulse may be appreciable in any artery, though the ear may detect no heart beat; still, when there is life, instruments of extreme delicacy, such as the telephonic stethoscope and the sphygmomanometer, will evidence the heart's functioning and the continuance of the circulation."

"The respirations, which are normally from sixteen to eighteen to the minute, may be reduced to as low as three or four the minute, and be of extraordinary shallowness; and yet the breath of life will be inspired and expired. Respiration will be going on."

"The temperature may be very subnormal, but if there is any life it is never so low as that of the absolutely inanimate body. And there is always some glow, some translucency to the countenance, something apart from the waxiness of the features of the dead."

Dr. Huber was asked how it was possible to make sure that a person was really dead and not in a state of suspended animation.

"We do not rely exclusively on any one sign," he said; "but we combine together such as we will now consider; and then there will be no doubt in any given case, nor any occasion to fear premature burial."

"First, there is absolute and unmistakable cessation of the heart's action and of the flow of blood in the vessels. Of this the experienced physician can beyond peradventure assure himself by the means mentioned. Also, the radial artery at the wrist may be opened, and if no blood appears the sufferer has died."

"Then there must be absolute stopping of the respiration. An infallible sign of this is to hold a cold mirror before the mouth and nostrils; if there is life the moisture of the breath will gather on the mirror. Another test is to place a cup of water on the chest and observe whether the reflection on its surface moves or remains still."

"With the unmistakable stopping of the circulation the skin becomes ashy pale and there is especially absence of the pink color by examination under the influence of a strong light. The bodily tissues lose their elasticity. The eyeballs of the truly dead lose that tenseness which always persists in syncope or trance. The pupils will not react to light; there is no vital reaction to irritants placed on the skin."

"The cooling of the body that has died advances at the rate of 1.6 degrees Fahrenheit per hour. The temperature of the living body is 98.6 degrees. In serious, though not necessarily fatal cases of cholera or yellow fever and like diseases the temperature may, very temporarily, go below 95 a degree or two; but generally the latter is the minimum at which life can be maintained. When, therefore, the bodily temperature, in a suspected case, has gone below 95 death must be considered to have happened."



The Later Anna— a Model of the True Parisienne.